

## Chapter 29

# The Golden Age of Athens

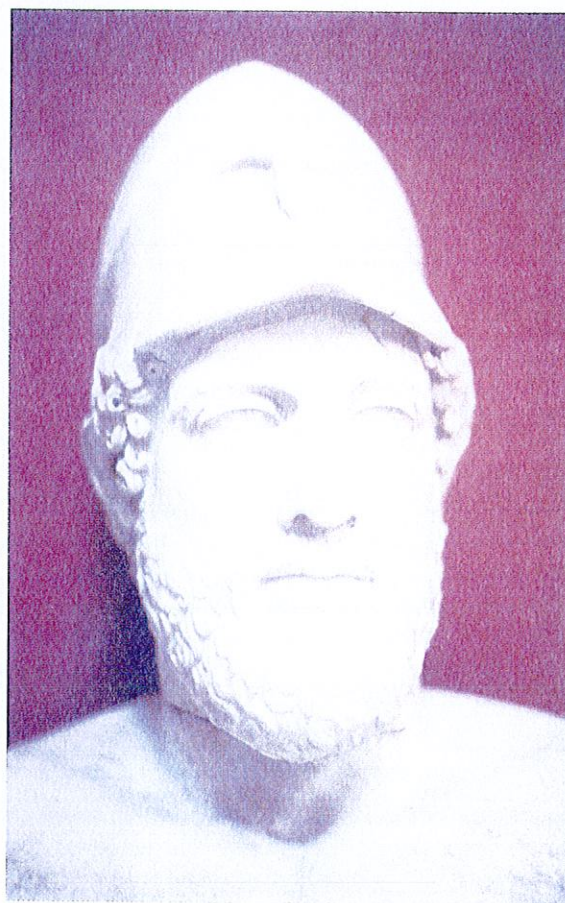
*What were the major cultural achievements of Athens?*

### 29.1 Introduction

At the end of the Persian wars, the city of Athens was in ruins. A great Athenian named Pericles (PER-uh-kleez) inspired the people of Athens to rebuild their city. Under his leadership, Athens entered its Golden Age, a period of peace and wealth. Between 479 and 431 B.C.E., Athens was the artistic and cultural center of Greece.

Suppose that you were able to visit Athens during its Golden Age. Passing through the city's gates, you would wind your way through narrow streets to the agora, the public meeting place in the center of the city. The agora is a large square. On two sides you would see magnificent public buildings. The other two sides have covered walkways where you would meet and talk with friends about current issues. In the center of the square are market stalls with a variety of goods for sale, from all over Greece and beyond. Nearby, you would see the acropolis, a high, craggy hill crowned with great temples, rising above the city.

In this chapter, you will explore several important sites in ancient Athens. At each site, you will learn about major cultural achievements accomplished during Athens's Golden Age. You will learn about Greek religion, architecture, sculpture, drama, philosophy, and sports.



This image shows Pericles, a great leader during the Golden Age of Athens.

◀ Note the Greek columns in the ruins of the Parthenon.



**Pericles** a great leader who developed Athens's culture, democracy, and power during its Golden Age

**Parthenon** the temple built on the acropolis above Athens, honoring the goddess Athena

**acropolis** the hill above a Greek city, on which temples were built

## 29.2 Athens After the Persian Wars

During the Persian wars, the Persians burned Athens to the ground, in 480 B.C.E, after defeating the Greeks in the Battle of Thermopylae. The Greeks eventually defeated the Persians, but the wars left Athens in ruins.

**Pericles, Leader of Athens** From about 460 to 429 B.C.E., **Pericles** was the leader of Athens's government. One of his chief contributions was to direct the rebuilding of the city. Pericles promoted constructing many public and religious buildings, including the **Parthenon**, the most famous temple in Athens.

Pericles believed that Athens was a model—in culture and in government—for all the Greek city-states. While the leader of Athens, he encouraged creativity in all of the arts, including music and drama. He was a strong supporter of democracy and made **reforms** to encourage its growth. He believed that all citizens had an equal right to participate in government. Under Pericles' leadership, Athens paid the salaries of men who held public office. This enabled poor men, who would otherwise have been unable to afford to leave their jobs and farms, the chance to serve in government positions.

**A City of Contrasts** Ancient Athens was a city of great contrasts. Many people lived in small, uncomfortable houses that lined narrow streets. Yet the city's public spaces and buildings were large and stately.

Most homes in Athens were one story high and made of mud bricks. The homes of poor families were very simple. The wealthier people had larger houses with rooms built around a central

courtyard. Athenian houses had few windows, so homes were usually lit by oil lamps.

The public spaces and buildings were the pride of Athens. The Athenians built large government buildings around the agora. These buildings were made of stone. On the **acropolis**, the hill above the city, the Athenians built magnificent temples as earthly homes for their gods and goddesses.

In this engraving, Pericles, seated, reviews building plans for the Parthenon, under construction in the background.

